

Assembly Bill No. 2117

CHAPTER 735

An act relating to watershed protection.

[Approved by Governor September 25, 2000. Filed
with Secretary of State September 27, 2000.]

LEGISLATIVE COUNSEL'S DIGEST

AB 2117, Wayne. Watershed protection.

Existing law provides for a watershed protection program, and provides funds to assist in implementing watershed plans to reduce flooding, control erosion, improve water quality, and improve aquatic and terrestrial species habitats, to restore natural systems of groundwater recharge, native vegetation, waterflows, and riparian zones, to restore the beneficial uses of waters of the state in watersheds, and to provide matching funds for federal grant programs.

This bill would require the Secretary of the Resources Agency and the State Water Resources Control Board to select 3 watershed protection projects in order to evaluate the existing collaborative and cooperative mechanism between the Resources Agency, the Environmental Protection Agency, federal agencies, local agencies, landowners, and environmental groups to determine whether the process can be streamlined for the preparation and implementation of comprehensive watershed management plans that protect and improve water quality.

The people of the State of California do enact as follows:

SECTION 1. The Legislature finds and declares all of the following:

(a) California has been implementing watershed protection programs pursuant to a number of state and federal programs and funding mechanisms.

(b) Collaborative efforts among federal, state, and local agencies, local stakeholder groups, landowners, and environmental groups are very important to the overall success of watershed protection programs.

(c) Voluntary watershed management programs can be an important means of achieving watershed protection and enhancement.

(d) California needs to evaluate how voluntary watershed programs can be structured to better coordinate and comply with the requirements of applicable federal, state, and local programs,

statutes, and regulations so that voluntary watershed programs can become viable mechanisms for watershed protection and enhancement.

SEC. 2. (a) The California Stream and Watershed Protection Project is hereby established.

(b) The Secretary of the Resources Agency and the State Water Resources Control Board shall select three watershed protection projects from all qualified applications submitted to the board for the project pursuant to this section. The selected watershed protection projects shall be chosen from different geographic regions in the state.

(c) The projects selected shall be used to evaluate the existing collaborative and cooperative mechanisms between the Resources Agency and the entities within the agency, the Environmental Protection Agency and its boards, departments, and offices, federal agencies, local agencies, local stakeholder groups, landowners, and environmental groups, to determine whether the process can be streamlined for the preparation and implementation of comprehensive watershed management plans, including voluntary watershed management, that protect and improve water quality.

(d) In implementing this chapter, the Resources Agency and the State Water Resources Control Board shall focus on the coordination of various watershed management plan elements, including, but not necessarily limited to, watershed assessments, watershed planning, watershed monitoring, evaluation and adaptive management, funding, outreach, and education. Selected projects shall be consistent with the requirements of applicable federal and state statutes and regulations.

(e) The State Water Resources Control Board, in conjunction with the Resources Agency, shall also evaluate whether voluntary watershed management programs are an effective and viable mechanism for statewide watershed protection and enhancement.

(f) The Resources Agency and the Environmental Protection Agency shall jointly submit to the Legislature, on or before February 1, 2002, a report that evaluates the pilot projects and makes recommendations, including possible changes to state law, on how to improve the coordination among federal, state, and local agencies and other interested parties in the implementation of watershed protection programs. In addition, the report shall include all of the following information:

(1) The baseline status of the watershed before the project, incorporating available data involving water quality, geomorphological conditions, the presence of endangered species, and other baseline conditions of interest to the watershed community, the State Water Resources Control Board, or the Resources Agency. The baseline status shall also include a description of the state of the watershed at the time the report is prepared,

including a description of the science based standards used to choose and evaluate the watershed project.

(2) Whether a stakeholder process was used to implement the watershed program, and a description of how that process worked and suggestions for improving that process for future projects.

(3) Recommendations on whether a broad-based public advisory committee is needed to make recommendations on funding watershed projects based on principles of general scientific credibility, and whether a standardized process is necessary to select future projects.